DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 657 SP 028 242

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TITLE Overcoming Teacher Shortages: The South Carolina Alternative Certification Program.
PUB DATE 23 Nov 86
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (Denver, CO, November, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Mathematics Instruction; *Nontraditional Education; Program Design; Science Instruction; *Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education Programs; *Teacher Shortage
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Certification; *South Carolina

ABSTRACT

The South Carolina Alternative Certification Program (ACP) is an alternate route to certification which provides teachers for the shortage areas of mathematics and science. Earning certification through the ACP requires completion of a rigorous pedagogical curriculum founded on teaching effectiveness research and on-the-job teacher training. The first phase of the ACP begins with an intensive one-week institute for teaching candidates who have met the program's content-knowledge requirements. In this phase, the candidates engage in peer-teaching with observation and evaluation by experienced teachers. Following this introductory phase, the candidates begin teaching in their home districts and attend eight monthly seminars devoted principally to classroom techniques. During the second phase, following a full year's teaching experience, the candidates refine their teaching skills with the help of consultants. The final phase of the program requires completion of three additional graduate courses within three years of the issuance of their conditional certificates. Once these requirements are met, candidates are eligible for full certification in South Carolina. (JD)

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OVERCOMING TEACHER SHORTAGES: THE SOUTH CAROLINA ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

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Paper Presented at the National Council
of the States on Inservice Education
Annual Meeting
Denver, Colorado
November 23, 1985

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Introduction

Can persons with strong academic skills be trained to teach effectively through nontraditional teacher education programs? Though this question ensures lively discussion, there is little debate over the need to raise the question. The need grows from the unfortunate fact that there is a national teacher shortage projected to expand into the 1990's. While it is anticipated that shortages will affect all public school teaching areas, few areas are expected to feel the impact of undersupply more severely than secondary mathematics and science.

All states project shortages of teachers in the critical areas of mathematics and science (McGeever, 1985). Regretably, this comes at a time when our nation is placing far greater emphasis on technological and economic concerns than ever before (Carnegie Report, 1986). At the same time, fewer college students are entering mathematics and science education programs, opting instead to prepare for jobs in business and industry. The consequences of this phenomenon are clear: without sufficient numbers of competent teachers in these disciplines, it will be impossible to educate our youth to the scientific and mathematical literacy the future will demand.

For a number of years, South Carolina has sought to ameliorate the problem of teacher undersupply. In 1984, the Education Improvement Act directed the creation of a teacher certification program for persons in critical shortage areas. Eligibility for this program requires that persons hold a Bachelor's degree in a certification area experiencing critical teacher shortages as determined by the State Board of Education. In addition, persons seeking certification

through this program must pass the appropriate specialty section of the National Teacher Exam (NTE), and be employed in a critical shortage area by a South Carolina school district. The Act specifies that candidates may apply for renewal of a conditional certificate for a maximum of three years provided they: (1) show satisfactory progress toward completion of a teacher certification program prescribed by the State Board of Education, and (2) remain employed in a South Carolina public school district. In 1984, the State Board of Education designated mathematics and science as the first two critical shortage areas.

During the 1984-1985 school year, a team of representatives from public schools, higher education and the State Department of Education met to develop a prescribed program of study for conditional teachers. The program they designed was adopted by the State Board of Education in May, 1985 and Winthrop College was selected to coordinate the program.

In developing what has come to be known as the South Carolina Alternative Certification Program (ACP), the committee directed that it be based on many of the same principles as are traditional teacher education programs. However, the ACP differs from traditional programs in its accelerated nature and in the modification of the student teaching requirement. The modification permits candidates to be employed as teachers while completing the certification program. To date, 99 persons are enrolled in the program and are teaching in 38 of the 46 counties in South Carolina.

Basic Assumptions

A set of basic assumptions underlies the Alternative Certification Program. These assumptions are consistent with the program's mission of providing a pedagogically defensible mechanism for resolving critical teacher shortages in specific academic areas. The program which has emerged is not proposed as a permanent substitute for traditional teacher education programs. In keeping with

this notion, the first assumption of the ACP is that there exists a research-based body of knowledge unique to teaching. Familiarity with this knowledge is necessary for all persons who aspire to be certified as teachers in the public schools. In this context, the mere possession of content area knowledge is not deemed sufficient for effective teaching.

A second assumption is that critical teacher shortages represent a threat to the quality of public education in South Carolina. This threat is exacerbated by the number of persons teaching in areas for which they are not qualified. An acceptable alternative is a program which requires proof of content knowledge, instruction in the science of teaching and supervised classroom experience. Persons with strong academic preparation in a critical shortage area, who have a genuine interest in teaching, should be encouraged to consider pursuing certification through such a program.

The belief that colleges of education, public schools and state departments of education must share responsibility in teacher education programs serves as a third assumption. The South Carolina program is founded on the belief that teachers are prepared best when all agencies concerned with preparing teachers work together. No teacher education program which becomes the exclusive domain of a single agency can hope to provide the breadth of experience and knowledge available through a program emphasizing shared responsibilities. Public school administrators should consider making use of this program when employing teachers in areas of critical shortage.

The South Carolina Model

Earning certification through the Alternative Certification Program requires completion of a rigorous pedagogical curriculum. The curriculum is founded in teaching effectiveness research and on-the-job teacher training. Consisting of three distinct sets of activities or phases, the ACP begins

with an intensive one-week institute for teaching candidates who have met the program's eligibility requirements.

At Winthrop College, candidates engage the pedagogical knowledges and skills believed to be most critical to effective teaching. Material is carefully selected by the staff and taught in ways that model the teaching principles being advanced. Through this approach, candidates learn not only teaching theory, but explore its practical application as well. Much emphasis is placed on teaching models which conform to current research. On the second day of the institute, candidates begin a series of peer teachings which continue throughout the week. These lessons are carefully evaluated by exemplary public school teachers who work with candidates to improve teaching skills. The public school evaluators judge all presentations for content accuracy, teaching effectiveness, maintenance of an appropriate learning environment and the management of student behavior. During this introductory week, candidates examine a number of professional considerations including the establishment of positive relations with students, parents and public school personnel. Upon completing the introductory one-week institute, candidates begin teaching in their home districts. If their performance during that week was judged to be satisfactory, they are invited to attend the first of eight monthly seminars which meet in Columbia. The staff brings the candidates together with consulting experts who discuss a wide range of topics including assertive discipline and other classroom management techniques, student motivation, characteristics of middle school and high school learners, writing across the curriculum, promotion of higher-level thinking skills, and the teaching of low achievers. Candidates also use the opportunity provided by monthly seminars to work with the staff in solving specific problems encountered in their teaching. Working with personnel in their own districts, candidates must satisfy the demands of three Assessment of Performance in Teaching (APT)

evaluations, successfully complete a full year of teaching and be offered a new contract. If all program requirements specified for this first phase are met, three hours of undergraduate credit are awarded by Winthrop College. The candidates who successfully complete these requirements move to the second phase of the ACP which begins with four weeks of additional training at Winthrop College.

Candidates enter the second phase with considerable information gleaned from the previous summer's one-week session, the monthly seminars, and a full year's teaching experience. They are now ready to refine their teaching strengths and to develop greater proficiency in areas of lesser competence. To these ends, candidates embark upon in-depth study of teaching effectiveness and a host of related professional concerns.

Assisting the staff during this month are thirty or more educational consultants from across the nation. These consultants are expected to go beyond the role of presenters, and to demonstrate the use of their instructional techniques within a public school classroom. Moreover, consultants direct candidates in the actual practice of what has been demonstrated. The staff believes this approach increases the likelihood that candidates will use information and skills taught in the institute when they return to their own classrooms.

Despite the inclusive nature of the curriculum used in the four-week institute, the major focus remains fixed on increasing teaching effectiveness. Peer teachings are continued, but are soon followed by assignments to summer school teaching responsibilities in local public schools. Again, highly competent public school personnel observe and evaluate the teaching experiences. Evaluators critique all aspects of the presentations, and work with candidates in remediating weaknesses. Accountability in this program is uncommonly high, and candidates know that continuation in the program is dependent upon their ability to meet the challenging standards established by the ACP staff.

To ensure that candidates' efforts in the program find their way back to local districts, the staff visits candidates in their home schools. During the visits, candidates are observed as they teach students and perform other assigned duties. In areas where need for greater skill is indicated, the staff works directly with the candidates, making additional visits to the school when necessary. While at the schools, the staff visits with school faculty and administrators discussing the candidate's progress and other concerns related to the program. Recommendations often are made at this time for additional assistance by the staff or the host school. When the staff determines that candidates are demonstrating teaching competence in their own schools, and when they have satisfied all requirements of the four-week institute, they are granted six hours of graduate credit from Winthrop College in an appropriate academic area. Meeting the requirements of these courses represents the completion of the second phase of the ACP. Advancement to the final phase is reserved to those candidates who remain in full-time public school teaching and who continue to satisfy all other program requirements.

During the final phase, candidates must complete three additional graduate courses within three years of the issuance of their conditional certificates. Although candidates may select the accredited college within which they will study, all candidates must complete studies in three prescribed areas. Courses emphasizing studies in educational psychology, reading in the secondary school, and the education of the exceptional child are required. Across the entire program, candidates earn three hours of undergraduate credit and fifteen hours of graduate credit in education courses. Once these requirements are met, candidates are eligible for full certification by the South Carolina Department of Education. In the final analysis, the South Carolina Alternative Certification Program is an alternate route to certification not

a substitute for certification. It is reasonable to assume that those who pass through this program bring to their classrooms solid knowledge of their academic disciplines and considerable skill in the arts and sciences of teaching. The public schools of South Carolina stand to gain much from this innovative approach to teacher certification.

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